

Garden Line - December 2010

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

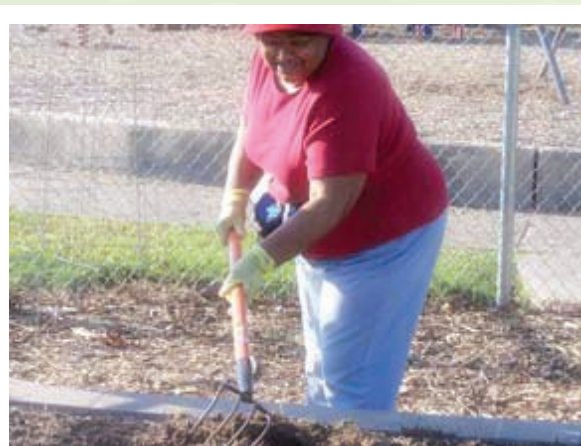
Well, folks, it's only a few weeks until winter! Where, oh where, has another year gone? I hope that you all had a nice Thanksgiving and were able to enjoy some time with your families, as well as enjoying some fresh veggies from your garden.



We normally see our first frost of the season sometime this month. Luckily for us, that doesn't mean that gardening has to come to an end. As long as the frosts are light (and they almost always are here in Houston), plants such as lettuce, cabbage, radishes, carrots, Swiss chards, and most of the other cool season plants will shrug off the frost and keep on growing. That's our good fortune, as there are so many great-tasting, nutritious plants we can grow in our gardens this time of year. Also, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, kohlrabi, bok choy, spinach, mustard greens, collard greens, turnips and several other cool season veggies can be started now.

Some of the best salads you'll ever have can come right out of your very own garden!

If your space is limited (such as an apartment or a small lot), don't feel you have to miss out on the bounty. Many vegetable crops can be grown quite easily in containers, though maybe on a limited scale. Anything you can grow in the ground or in a raised bed you can grow in a pot; you just have to pay more attention to water and fertilizer requirements. Start with a good quality potting soil and maybe mix in some compost. Make sure you don't use topsoil, as it will pack down and drain poorly, dooming your plants to a slow death in their pots. Plan to fertilize every two to three weeks for potted vegetables to keep them growing well, as all that watering leaches the nutrients out of the soil very quickly.



Now, about frost! No one likes it, but you need to be prepared. Make sure you have some old sheets, blankets, or some frost cloth handy to cover your tender plants on those cold nights. It's only a matter of time, you know. A few years back I purchased a product called the "Planket", available at Home Depot. They are a bit pricey but have a sewn-in drawstring which makes them easy to install over shrubs or big flower-filled pots. They come in several different sizes and are made of a breathable fabric. I have five or six of them and they come in handy each winter.



I hope that you all have a very happy holiday season. Try to find a little time to spend in the garden this month. Get out there and plant some cool season veggies or add some winter color to your landscape in the form of snapdragons, pansies, violas, kale, and alyssum! Stay warm, and happy gardening!

